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Real Voter Fraud: Suppression, Intimidation and Denying the Right to Vote

By Jim Condos, Vermont's Secretary of State

I've never been known to sugarcoat things, so I'm going to be frank. Recent events are causing increasing concerns that our democracy is in peril. Let me explain.

Voting is the foundation of our democracy. Since my first day as Secretary of State, and before that as a State Senator, I've worked to encourage voter participation by breaking down barriers to ensure eligible Vermont citizens are able to vote.

First, let me say I am proud to live in a state where our focus is on increasing access to the ballot box. To this end, we've made great progress in Vermont.

In January, we implemented same-day voter registration, making it easier for Vermonters to register and vote on Election Day.

Also in January, with the Department of Motor Vehicles, we implemented automatic voter registration – when an eligible voter receives/renews their license at the DMV they are either registered to vote, or their registration updates their current address, providing for more accurate voter lists and even greater election integrity.

Both same-day and automatic voter registration passed Vermont's legislature with strong tri-partisan support, and I was proud to initiate and support these important objectives.

Here's the point: because voting is the foundation of our democracy, government has a responsibility to make voting easy and accessible for every eligible voter. Unfortunately, across this country, we are seeing an increased erosion of voting rights in many states.

I am deeply troubled by the announcement that the President signed an executive order establishing a commission to review alleged voter fraud in our elections. Since the 2016 election, President Trump has made repeated unsubstantiated claims of widespread voter fraud. Credible studies have shown over and over again that widespread voter fraud simply does not exist, and election officials from across the country, Democrat and Republican, agree.

So why the brazen claims of widespread voter fraud?

I believe these unproven claims are an effort to set the stage to weaken and skew our democratic process through a systematic national effort of voter suppression and intimidation.

Let's be honest: the real voter fraud that is occurring is the active campaign to roll back voting rights. The President's unsubstantiated claims have emboldened these efforts. Photo ID laws, like those in Texas, Wisconsin, North Carolina and Alabama, force citizens to travel over 100 miles to their closest DMV, even though they might be poor, disabled, or unable to drive. Other states have also pursued enactment of some form of voter ID law, many of which have been found by the courts to be outright unconstitutional.

Restrictions on early voting periods, limiting access, due to distance or time, to registration and voting locations, and overly aggressive purging of eligible voters from voter rolls are all examples of ways in which some states are suppressing voter participation and discouraging certain eligible voters from having a voice in elections.

These attacks on voting rights have a sole aim: to disenfranchise lower-income, student, senior and minority voters. It's that simple, and the courts have started to recognize this.

The fact that Vice President Pence and Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach have been announced as Chair and Vice Chair of this commission confirms my worst fears. Both are unabashed supporters of restrictive voter ID laws, as they exaggerate claims of voter fraud.

Secretary Kobach has championed some of the most restrictive voting laws in the country. The leadership of this commission is a clear prelude to what I expect to be a reinvigorated nationwide campaign promoting strict voter suppression laws and voter intimidation.

How do we fight back? We start at home and lead by example. Automatic voter registration is a system every state, regardless of the party in power, can and should support. Everyone should stand behind generous early voting periods and ample registration opportunities right up to, and even on the same day as an election.

Our Vermont elections will continue to put voters first.

In the coming months and years ahead, we need leaders to stand up and denounce these attacks on our democratic ideals. We must make decisions about how we conduct our elections based on facts, not fear. We cannot allow the President's unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud scare us into unravelling the threads of our democratic process.

We must continue to move forward, not backwards – our democracy is at stake.

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